2: Hickinbotham G-4, 5 (ca. 1931-ca. 1957)
1958 MM1 Aden MM1

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

From the "Upper Circle" 1958

000 TWO years have passed since I left Aden and ceased to take an active part in the South Arabian drama, and much has happened in the Middle East in that comparatively short space of time. I feel, therefore, that this work would not be complete if I did not refer briefly to major events which have directly and indirectly had their effect on both the Colony and the Protectorate. I do so as a spectator far removed from the Arabian stage, and in consequence I may have missed some of the finer points, but the general theme of the play has not been too difficult to follow.

829 This is neither the place nor the time to examine the pros and cons of the action taken by the British Government in conjunction with the French Government following on the seizure in 1956 of the Suez Canal by President Nasser of Egypt. It is the effect of that action on the people of Aden with which I am concerned. At first the landing at Suez surprised and bewildered moderates and extremists in the Colony alike, but when the initial shock had worn off the moderates voiced their disapproval in reasonable language and the extremists made the most of the aggression aspect of the affair and condemned the, to their way of thinking, unprovoked attack upon an Arab country. There were those, but they were very few, who were prepared to say plainly that they hoped our action would result in the downfall of Nasser. But whatever may have been said in public there were many who in private desired our success, though they could not approve the method we had employed.

441 The trading community was gravely disturbed, not so much
434 by the possible political consequences of Suez, but by the

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actual effect the closure of the Canal must have on their own business interests. Events showed that they had good reason to be concerned. Shipping fell away rapidly. The monthly average of ships entering the port of Aden for the six months prior to the crisis, that is, from May to October 1956, was 454. In November only 277 ships used the port, and by February 1957 the number was down to 93, the lowest point to be reached. Business throughout the Colony was similarly affected and the trade with passengers, on which the merchants of Steamer Point depend for their livelihood, virtually ceased as all passenger ships were diverted round the Cape.

The finances of the Colony were dealt a blow from which they have yet to recover and behind the immediate and, it was hoped, temporary dislocation of trade, there lurked the fear that the major Shipping Companies having once become accustomed to routing their ships by the Cape to Australia and the Far East, would continue to do so even when the Canal was open once again to world shipping. Mercifully for the Government of Aden and the trading community and all who depended upon them and the port for their living this fear proved to be groundless. Once the Canal was cleared and reopened the volume of shipping returned to normal much earlier than had been expected by the most optimistic.

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The bright side of the picture was that in spite of the divergence of views over Suez, personal relations between Government officials and their Arab friends remained unimpaired. At the same time the example of moderation shown by the local Press, in particular in the English language, was one which even the newspapers in the United Kingdom would have done well to have followed. All newspapers in Aden are Arab or Indian-owned and the two main English language papers are both Arab owned and Arab edited. All the more commendable, therefore, was their restraint during this most difficult period.

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In the Protectorate the reaction was somewhat different. There was satisfaction that Her Majesty's Government had, at last, shown that they were capable of strong and determined action and with it was born a hope in the hearts of the Rulers on the Yemen frontier that it would be the turn of that country